ORIGIN/ACTION
INFO Embassy

RMR	REP	EAP
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ARA	EUR	FE
NEA 7	CU	INR 5
E	P 2	IO 5
L	PSD	AID
	S/P 1	
AGR	COM	FRB
INT	LAB	TAP
FR	XMB	AIR 5
ARMY 3	CIA 20	NAVY 5
OSD 33	USIA 10	NSA —
	JCS 2	

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

POL 23-9 GREECE

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A-2948
NO.

UNCLASSIFIED

PRIORITY
HANDLING INDICATOR

TO DEPARTMENT OF STATE

INFO ANKARA, ATHENS, ISTANBUL, NICOSIA, PARIS, THESSALONIKI, USUN

FROM Amembassy LONDON

DATE May 2, 1967

SUBJECT: The Greek Coup and the British Labor Left

REF

The enclosed feature article from the New Statesman of April 28 typifies preliminary views held by leftwing Labor Party circles on the Greek coup. The editorial criticizes the struggle between the "oligarchy" and George Papandreou, argues that the Palace, ERE politicals and the US Embassy may prefer "a more presentable civil facade and a new round of rigged elections," and calls on HMG to stand up and be counted as opposed to the junta regime.

Comment: Leftwing Members of Parliament have not signed the Macmillan motion expressing fraternal sympathy with the British Embassy. (London A-2912, dated April 27).

Enclosure:
New Statesman article

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Drafted by: POL:WTBrubeck:mlp Date: 4/28/67

Classification Approved by: POL William H. Brubeck

Greece Shall Yet be Free

What has happened in Greece is, in its essentials, perfectly simple. Power has been seized by a handful of uniformed conspirators, fearful of democracy and in particularly of a democratic victory in the election that they have now averted. They have jailed their opponents by the thousand, quashed the most elementary civil liberties and based their rule on the arbitrament of naked force. They have done – with complete success, alas, at least in the short run – what the Spanish generals attempted in 1936; and the Greek people have the same right to resist and to call on the aid of democrats abroad as the Spanish people had then.

The 'free world' stands open to a straightforward test of sincerity, for all the rhetoric is hollow unless it inspires support for the Greeks in their struggle to regain their freedom. It cannot be said that Britain, the traditional friend of Greek liberty, has made much of a start in meeting this responsibility. Our newspapers have abstained from those condemnations which they produce so readily when democracy falls victim to communists or, more recently, to African nationalists. No ringing declarations have come from the world's largest democratic socialist party. There are occasions for prudence, for 'awaiting fuller information', for 'studying the situation'; but this is a time to stand up and be counted.

However, if the principles are clear, this does not mean that the story is devoid of complexities; and one of our responsibilities is to understand exactly what has happened and why. The putsch is another round in a contest that has been waged ever since Greece threw off Turkish rule. Formal democracy has prevailed intermittently during the past century, but real democracy has never had a chance to establish itself. It has been held at bay by a power élite made up from the royal family, the army and certain large economic concerns. This oligarchy was in jeopardy when Greece was liberated from Nazi occupation, but superior force – sponsored by Winston Churchill, Ernest Bevin and Harry Truman – secured the return of the monarchy and of 'safe' government. As recently as 1961, it was able to maintain its power and yet to present a facade of respectability by managing a tame parliament produced by a combination of demagogy and 'controlled' elections.

But, under a frozen surface, a significant movement of opinion has presented a new threat to the oligarchs. In overtly political terms, the Greek power struggle is triangular. The right-wing party – successively entitled Populist, National Rally, and today National Radical Union (ERE) – had at its peak the allegiance of perhaps half the population. About a quarter, a decade ago, supported the communists and their sympathisers, organised in the United Democratic Left (EDA) because an openly communist party is illegal. Solid hope for Greek democracy has found expression in the rise of the Centre Union, formed in 1961 to inherit the traditions of the old Liberal Party.

The Right, in every election and now in trying to justify the putsch, has used the tactic of charging the Centre Union with being 'soft on communism' and warning that its leader, George Papandreou, would be either a reluctant or a willing Kerensky if allowed to become prime minister. The truth is the reverse. In a climate less reactionary than that of Greece, the Centre Union men would be recognised as moderate reformers. They advanced to office – if not, as we have seen, to real power – by drawing votes from both the Right and the communists. The free election of 1964 gave them 53 per cent of the poll, while ERE slipped to 35 per cent and EDA to 12 per cent. The election scheduled for May 1967 was expected by the shrewdest observers (including seditious colonels) to show a continuance of these trends, further setbacks on both flanks, and an emphatic Centre Union victory. Ironically, it is the crushing of democracy – the elimination of the Centre Union from the arena and indeed of the arena of democratic politics itself – that may restore the communists to their old position as the sole challengers to dictatorship.

As prime minister in 1964, Papandreou had a clear parliamentary majority. Though he was studiously moderate in both policy and tactics, he could not avoid clashes with the oligarchy. He met resistance when he proposed to replace economic stagnation by expansion, when he tried to make inroads on glaring inequalities of wealth, when he attempted educational reform, and when he would not

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implement the settlement of the Cyprus dispute desired by US diplomacy. However, his downfall was predictable when he found himself obliged to challenge the enemies of democracy in their most cherished strongholds: the power of the throne and the influence of the army. True, he was fighting on battlefields conceded centuries ago in such countries as Britain. But these prerogatives are vital barriers to democratic advance and social change in Greece.

Papandreou had at first agreed to accept a royal nominee as Minister of Defence. But when he tried to dismiss the minister and bring the army under civilian control (in accordance with the constitution), the King refused to sign the pertinent decrees. Instead he accused Papandreou of plotting to subvert the army. This was the so-called plot for which democratically-minded officers have been punished. Events have now made it clear that Papandreou was utterly justified in 'interfering' with the army. At the same time, he insisted that the king should behave as a constitutional monarch, cooperating with a government so long as it had the confidence of parliament and, if this were lost, presiding over new elections.

King Constantine, however, took the line that the army was responsible only to the throne and that he had a right to dismiss a government even when it admittedly had the backing of parliament and people. Thus, making use of the dispute over the ministry of defence, the king dismissed Papandreou in 1965. He then proceeded to take a direct hand in the political game and act as the virtual leader of the anti-democratic forces. Securing the defection of enough Centre Union MPs to put Papandreou in a minority, he contrived after four attempts to construct a new government. But it proved unstable, and he was at last forced to contemplate an election – a solution to which Papandreou confidently agreed, though he had a right to insist simply on his own reappointment.

Despite his massive popular support – a million people joined in demonstrations after his dismissal – Papandreou hesitated to pose the issue of 'king versus people'. But in recent weeks, when there was an obvious prospect that the king would destroy the constitution and hand Greece over to a dictatorship, the Centre Union declared that such action must imply the forfeiture of his right to reign. The choice was now up to Constantine. He could have preserved his throne by renouncing dictatorial schemes and permitting free elections. He naturally came under pressure to follow the opposite course, and to that pressure he yielded – how willingly or how reluctantly, we cannot be sure. He may genuinely be at loggerheads with the new rulers, or he may wish to keep his distance from them so as to survive them if their power, manifestly unstable, proves transient. What is certain is that his actions since he came to the throne have outraged democracy and paved the way to dictatorship. His efforts to pose as a democratic hero should deceive nobody. At the same time, the dictatorship depends crucially on his support. Deprived of that, it would lack – in international status as well as in Greek eyes – even the shadowy legality that comes from allegiance to the monarch. The king himself runs no risks: the regime dare not kill or imprison him. He can still live down his record by repudiating the putsch and accepting a return to democracy.

The junta which has seized power is comprised of officers who – though perhaps too ideologically hollow to be accurately called fascists – are intensely authoritarian, bitterly scornful of the Greek people, and imbued with pathological fear of a 'communism' with which they identify all shades of liberal democracy. What education they possess is mainly derived from US military academies and from technocratic professionalism. However, their political base is perilously narrow; already five senior generals have had to be sacked, and sophisticated figures in the oligarchy – however opposed to democracy – may well be distrustful of such champions.

Alike in the palace, among ERE politicians and in the US embassy, a preference may soon emerge for a more presentable civilian facade and a new round of rigged elections. But such calculations reckon without the deep resentment, the devotion to freedom and the political intelligence of the Greek people. We may reasonably hope that, if they can win back the smallest elbow-room for free expression, they will not stop short of making sure that this time democracy is restored and secured.

A great deal depends on the outside world and on the allies of Greece in particular. The overthrow of the dictatorship is a vital interest for western democratic nations, first on grounds of principle, secondly because Europe cannot efford renewed instability in the Balkans and a return to the worst days of the cold war – heralded perhaps by a tragic civil war in Greece itself. Britain has not hesitated in the past to take a decided line on Greek affairs, and now the British government should lose no time in declaring its concern for the release of political prisoners, the re-establishment of civil liberties, and the restoration of the violated constitution and of the last freely elected government – that of the Centre Union. A single courageous statement from London may tip the balance and save Greece from illimitable suffering. There can be no excuse and no forgiveness for the silence that means a condonation of evil.

London
Enclosure to A- 2948
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